

SUBSTANDARD HOUSING IN GREENSBORO

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SUBSTANDARD HOUSING IN GREENSBORO

Greensboro experiences many of the same problems which most cities of this nation face. Greensboro also has a large number of dedicated public officials and private citizens who are seeking ways to solve the various difficulties of the city.

One of the primary challenges facing Greensboro, and all of America today, is housing. In 1937, Congress began subsidizing low-rent public housing. Twelve years later, Congress declared in the preamble to the 1949 Housing Act a goal of "A decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."¹ In the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968, Congress reaffirmed this purpose and added that HUD should set "forth a plan for the decade for elimination of all substandard housing and the achievement of these (1968 Act) goals."²

Yet despite the obvious detracting from the beauty of our cities; despite the diseases which are bred in many slums and transported to other sections of our cities;

¹Catherine Bauer Wurster, "Framework for an Urban Society," Goals for Americans. Prentice-Hall (1960), p. 229.

²"The Housing Act of 1968," Urban Land. Vol. 27, No. 9 (October, 1968), p. 9.

despite the social and economic problems which have continued to develop and grow, and consequently cost communities much, both monetarily and psychologically; and incidentally, despite the ruinous waste of the lives of thousands of individuals, this problem has been little more than half-heartedly approached.

The National Commission on Urban Problems declares that "The nation in thirty years of public housing built fewer units than Congress, back in 1949, said were needed in the immediate next six years A third of our affluent nation cannot afford adequate, non-subsidized housing today, despite great gains in our housing stock."³

Although Greensboro has made significant strides toward replacing substandard dwellings with standard ones and toward providing adequate housing for the residents of the city, the accomplishment of this task is not in view. Thus, greater efforts must be shouldered by public agencies, and especially private organizations, so that this basic need can be met.

William C. Gordon, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of Greensboro, relates that approximately 1,000 families eligible for public housing are on the waiting list. Surely, this number does not include all those who are

³"Building the American City", Urban Land. Vol. 28, No. 3 (March, 1969), p.5.

eligible or who need some assistance in obtaining decent housing. Mr. Gordon believes that "there is a tremendous need among the white population for low-rent housing, although applications from white families are not made too often."⁴

The Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate various general population characteristics related to the housing of families and individuals who reside in delapidated or deteriorating structures outside urban renewal areas.

Answers will be sought to the following questions:

1. How long have these persons lived at their present address?
2. What is the household composition of the dwelling?
3. What is the income of the household?
4. How many rooms and bedrooms are found in the dwelling?
5. What is the payment for the housing unit?

⁴Remarks by William C. Gordon, Director of the Housing Authority of Greensboro, at a meeting of the Population Committee of the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, May 19, 1969.

6. What attitudes are present regarding the dwelling and the possibility of moving into better housing?

Procedure

The concept of conducting a study dealing with substandard housing in Greensboro was first discussed with Mr. Tom Pickard, Director of the Research Division of the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce. A general proposal was then submitted to the Population Committee of the Chamber for examination and suggestions. A study program on substandard housing was outlined based on the proposal and ideas generated at the meeting. This program was presented to the Research Division Committee of the Chamber for review.

The methodology consequently derived involved an accumulation from all city planning and housing agencies of all known maps of delapidated and deteriorating dwellings. A composite map of substandard housing was constructed using all information available.⁵ (See Figure 1 for map of substandard housing.) Since the Greensboro Redevelopment

⁵Maps and information were obtained from the 1960 Census of Population by Street Block, the Greensboro Redevelopment Commission, and the Greensboro City Planning Department.

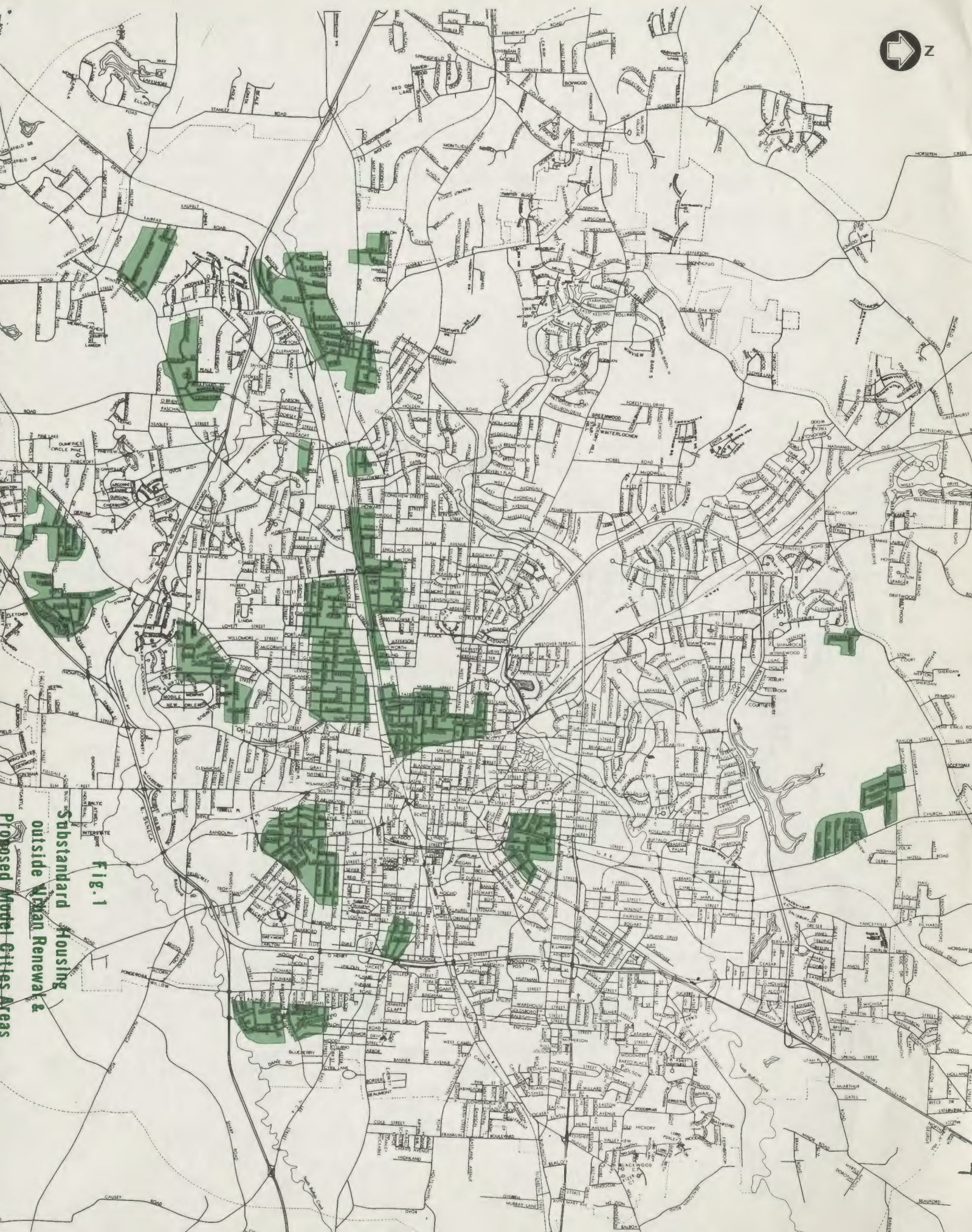


Fig. 1
Substandard Housing
outside Urban Renewal &
Proposed Model Cities Areas

Commission has carried out extensive studies of substandard housing within urban renewal and proposed model cities areas and since this information is available, the study deals only with core areas of delapidated and deteriorating housing outside the sections already investigated by this agency.

The author and director of the Research Division of the Chamber visited all of the areas designated as having substandard housing, noting the address of all dwellings that should be placed in this category. A random sample of these structures was taken and interviews were conducted using a printed questionnaire. (See Figure 2. for the questionnaire.)

A total of 189 completed questionnaires forms the basis of this study.

General Population Characteristics

Substandard housing is generally considered to be able to survive because of the presence of a sizeable group of people which is unable to pay high prices for dwellings, together with the existence of a demand for good housing being greater than the supply, under prevailing conditions of market value and discriminatory realty practices.

QUESTIONNAIRE (Please circle or fill in appropriate response to each question)

Address: _____ Apt. # _____

How long have you lived at this address? (1) _____ Race: (2) W (3) N (4) I (5) O

Adults: (6) male _____ (7) fem. _____ (8) under 62 _____ (9) 62 & over _____

Children: (10) under 6 _____ (11) 6-12 _____ (12) 13-18 _____

Adults
(24) Head
(25) Spouse
(26) Other
(27) Other

Type Employment	Education	Age	\$1-32	\$33-64	\$65-97	\$98-130	Emp.	DPW	VA	Other

Do you (28) own home (29) rent home (30) rent apartment. If renting apartment, # units in building (31) _____

No. rooms in your unit (32) _____ # bedrooms (33) _____

Payment per week: (34) \$0-\$5 (35) \$5.01-\$10 (36) \$10.01-\$15 (37) \$15.01-\$20 (38) \$20.01-\$25 (39) Over \$25.01

Are you satisfied with the house you now have (40) Yes (41) No

If not satisfied, why not: (42) rent too high (43) bad condition (44) overcrowded (45) other _____

If not satisfied, why haven't you moved? (46) _____

If you were to move or were looking for another place to live, would you prefer to:

(47) rent house (48) rent apartment (49) buy house (50) go into public housing

If you would not prefer to buy a house, why not? (51) _____

Have you applied for public housing? (52) Yes (53) No.

Comments: _____

Completed by: _____

Date _____

FIGURE 2.

This nation is considered to contain a tremendously mobile population. Every year approximately one-fifth of the people change their residence. One might suppose that the rate of movement of persons living in substandard housing would be greater. Thus, one would perhaps expect to find that those individuals residing in such dwellings would have been there only a short time.

According to the data obtained during the interviews, such suppositions can be shown to be somewhat incorrect. Although a certain degree of mobility can be ascertained, the study group is much more stable than the total population.

Whereas 13.8 per cent of the households has resided at the present address for less than one year, and 30.2 per cent for less than three years, 37.6 per cent has remained in the same dwelling for ten years or more (Table 1). Moreover, slightly over one-half of these families has lived in the same house for over six years. Upon considering the conditions in which they live, one might readily question why so many remained so long.

Table 1. Length of time at present residence

Time	Number	Per Cent
Less than 1 year	26	13.8
1 year - 1 year, 11 months	17	9.0
2 years - 2 years, 11 months	14	7.4
3 years - 3 years, 11 months	12	6.3
4 years - 5 years, 11 months	25	13.2
6 years - 7 years, 11 months	16	8.5
8 years - 9 years, 11 months	8	4.2
10 years or more	71	37.6

The composition of the households partially explains this greater stability of residence. Nearly 30 per cent of the adults are sixty-two years of age or over (Table 2.) Since older persons tend to move much less often than younger people, the many long-term stays are related to the many elderly adults.

The adult male-female ratio is rather low, being 0.79 to 1. This is certainly a reflection of the large proportion of households (23 per cent) having a female head. Seventy per cent of these female heads has no children, and many of these are among the elderly. Most of the recent movers are young single people and young married couples with no or young children.

Many of the households contain four or more children, but because of the high proportion of older adults, the numbers

of persons per household (3.5) and children per household (1.4) are low.

Table 2. Household composition, by age and sex

Members	Number	Per Cent
Adults		
Male	174	44.2
Female	220	55.8
Under 62 years of age	278	70.6
62 years of age or over	116	29.4
Children		
Under 6 years of age	65	24.3
6-12 years of age	112	41.8
13-18 years of age	91	34.0

The income of a household is a very important factor in being able to acquire a decent dwelling under present housing market and general cost-of-living conditions.

The average weekly household income of slightly over one-third of the group is \$64.00 or less (Table 3.). For those who have children or who must pay rent, this is hardly enough to obtain good housing. Nearly all of the households in this income range have no employed member. Twenty-seven per cent of all households

in the study group are in this category. This percentage is practically the same as the one for adults sixty-two years of age or over. This particular situation is eased somewhat by the fact that 30 per cent of the households has their own homes paid for.

The very low income persons cannot be easily dismissed regarding needs for adequate housing, however. The situation still remains that another 40 per cent of the families do not spend more than \$15.00 per week, or about \$64.00 a month, for a dwelling (Table 4). Moreover, both those owning their own home and those paying \$15.00 a week or less are in substandard housing and nearly one-half of these are earning less than \$65.00 a week. Standard housing is needed for these two groups, which together comprise 70 per cent of the total sample.

Table 3. Weekly income per household

Income	Number	Per Cent
\$1 - \$32	31	16.4
\$33 - \$64	34	18.0
\$65 - \$97	33	17.5
\$98 - \$130	38	20.1
Over \$130	43	22.8
No response	10	5.3

A household with a fairly good income is usually thought to be able to secure a decent dwelling. However, this is actually not the case. Large families, high medical bills, discriminatory housing practices, and other factors can negate such an opportunity.

At least 43 per cent of the households has an average weekly income of \$98.00 or more. Nevertheless, only 5 per cent pay over \$25.00 per week for housing--approximately one-fourth of the above income. Only another 6 per cent pay between \$20.01 and \$25.00 per week. Thus, whereas 43 per cent should probably be able to afford \$25.00 or more a week for housing, only 5 per cent do so.

Evidently many factors are influential in gauging the relative amount of the household income that can be applied toward housing. An examination of the reasons for these discrepancies would seem to be needed.

Table 4. Weekly payment on dwelling unit

Payment	Number	Per Cent
\$.01 - \$5.00	4	2.1
\$5.01 - \$10.00	20	10.6
\$10.01 - \$15.00	52	27.5
\$15.01 - \$20.00	31	16.4
\$20.01 - \$25.00	12	6.3
Over \$25.00	9	4.8
House paid for	56	29.6
No response	5	2.6

One will note that only 5 per cent of the substandard dwellings in the sample commands a weekly payment of more than \$25.00.

Therefore, since nearly 90 per cent of the households either own homes or pay no more than \$20.00 per week for a dwelling, a general assumption could be made that most of these households probably cannot pay more than \$20.00 a week for housing.

Many persons seem to believe that Negroes, and perhaps a few from other minority groups, compose practically all of the people living in substandard housing. These groups do tend to have the greatest proportions of their populations in such dwellings and they are most often largely concentrated in certain sections

of town, giving the impression that they are almost the sole occupants of delapidated or deteriorating structures.

However, once one moves outside of the major ethnic core area, one notes the presence of many whites living under similar conditions. The random sample of occupants of substandard dwellings located outside the urban renewal and model cities areas resulted in interviews being conducted with only 28.0 per cent Negro, but 71.4 per cent white, with only 0.5 per cent Indian residents. Thus, one can readily see that many whites are also in need of better housing.

General Housing Characteristics

The size of a dwelling unit is an important factor to be considered when a family is searching for a place to live. However, this requirement is greatly tempered by the cost factor. In light of the financial position of the families in this group and other factors, such as the number of members in the household, over 85 per cent chose a dwelling with six rooms or less (Table 5).

Although the living quarters are frequently cramped, generally appearance is often relinquished for more space.

Nevertheless, in many instances, the sizes of the present unit can be a guide to the needs for the future. However, when seriously contemplating actual construction plans for new housing, a detailed study of the degree of crowding now present will have to be considered.

Table 5. Size of dwelling unit

Size	Number	Per Cent
Rooms		
1 - 2	9	4.8
3 - 4	77	40.7
5 - 6	75	39.7
7 - 8	22	11.6
9 - 10	6	3.2
Bedrooms		
1	29	15.3
2	92	48.7
3	47	24.9
4	19	10.1
5	2	1.1

A general impression as to how much crowding exists can be gained from this study. Five of the 189 households (2.6 per cent) are judged to be seriously overcrowded--this is, seven to nine persons living in three or four rooms with one or two bedrooms. Fifteen more (7.9 per cent) are considered to be

overcrowded--that is, four to six persons living in three or four rooms with one or two bedrooms, or seven to nine persons living in five or six rooms with two bedrooms. Finally, twenty others (10.6 per cent) are thought to be crowded--that is, four to six persons living in three or four rooms with three bedrooms, or four to six persons living in five or six rooms with two bedrooms, or seven to nine persons living in five or six rooms with three or four bedrooms.

Therefore, at least 21 per cent of the households are not only substandard, but also crowded in varying degrees. One-third of the 40 households indicated that they are satisfied.

Two-thirds of the people living in crowded conditions are dissatisfied, which represents 26 households. One-third of the total households (63) are dissatisfied. Also, 36.5 per cent of the dissatisfaction comes from nonwhites, who account for 28.5 per cent of the total sample.

Of the 189 households in the study group, 55.6 per cent are renting either a home or an apartment. However, 55.6 per cent of the 63 households dissatisfied with their housing would prefer to buy a home, 28.6 per cent would prefer to rent a home, 11 per cent would prefer to rent an apartment, an

5 per cent would prefer to go into public housing. However, only 8 per cent of all the households in the study has applied for public housing.

Approximately two-thirds of those who do not prefer to buy a house state their main reason is that they cannot afford to do so. However, when asked why they have not moved if they are dissatisfied, the three reasons given most often are lack of enough money, lack of enough choice in housing, and nearness to their job. The inability to find another place is frequently governed by finances, even if the individual does not express this. Also, if their finances were somewhat greater, several might be able to find a way to work so that proximity to their job would not be a significant factor in their not moving.

Forty-six per cent of the 63 households dissatisfied with their present dwelling state that the main reason is the bad condition of the unit. Twenty-nine per cent say it is because they are overcrowded. These two factors, therefore, account for three-fourths of the dissatisfaction.

The need, then, as expressed by these people is for housing of better quality and more space. Yet, this housing,

if it is to be within the reach of these families, must be constructed and financed with the other factors considered above, such as income and dwelling cost.

Mr. C. O. Williamson, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager, relates that 2,000 low-income dwelling units are "critically needed" and that even this number "wouldn't solve our housing problems."⁶

There can be no doubt that low-income housing is in great demand in Greensboro, as it is in many parts of the nation. Solving the problem is a great challenge for this community. If action is not taken soon, housing conditions will worsen, costs will soar, and all related problems will be more difficult to solve. Private citizens and community organizations in Greensboro have waited long enough to take the giant step necessary to bring about a solution to this problem. It is a time for Decision! It is a time for Action!

⁶"Housing Foundation Urged," Greensboro Record August 5, 1969, p. B-1,2.